Information pack

Forth & Clyde Canal

wild over waterways

Are you interested in learning about Britain's canals? Read this booklet to find out about Scotland's first canal.

www.wow4water.net

Information sheet 1

Forth & Clyde Canal

A yacht travels under a lift bridge on the Forth and Clyde Canal

The Forth and Clyde Canal is just over 56 km long. When it was built it ran from Grangemouth on the River Forth to Bowling on the River Clyde. It is wide and deep enough to carry sea-going boats.

Why was it built?

During the 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution progressed, towns were keen to be connected to larger cities, coalfields and industrial centres so that trade could expand. Many canals were built to speed up transport.

The Forth and Clyde Canal served three main purposes. Firstly, it provided a link from the west coast of Scotland to the east. This meant that ships no longer had to sail around the dangerous seas of the north of Scotland.

Secondly, the Forth and Clyde Canal provided a good way to transport imported and local goods from one coast to the other and the towns in between. Thirdly, it allowed passengers to travel across Scotland, as many coach services linked up with canal services.

Information sheet 2

Forth & Clyde Canal

The locks on the Forth and Clyde are big enough for sea-going ships

Where and how was it built?

The idea to build a canal across central Scotland had been suggested in the 17th century, but nothing was seriously done until John Smeaton, an engineer, made initial surveys in the 1760s.

The Forth and Clyde Canal was built from east to west over a period of 22 years. Work started on it in 1768 at Grangemouth. At that time there was no town there, but as the canal developed so did Grangemouth.

Work stopped on the canal in 1775 as money had run out. In 1777, Glasgow's merchants funded the building of a canal branch from Stockingfield Junction on the main line, south towards Glasgow. By 1785, when the canal company had enough money to carry on building, John Smeaton had retired and a new engineer, Robert Whitworth was appointed. The final section of the canal from Stockingfield Junction to Bowling in the west was completed in 1790.

Information sheet 3

Forth & Clyde Canal

Having fun on the canal

Rise and fall of the canal

When it opened in 1790, the Forth and Clyde Canal was very prosperous and well used. The canal opened up central Scotland to domestic and international trade. Towns and cities near the canal became rich. People were also able to use the canal to travel and passenger boats were built to carry them. The boats were very comfortable and safe compared with a horse and carriage.

In 1842, the first railways were built in Scotland. Trains were a lot faster than boats and they went to more places. Passengers began to start to use trains rather than boats. Soon it became cheaper to send goods by train than by boat. Traffic on the canal declined although it was not until 1963 that the canal was closed when road building meant the canal was severed in many places.

In 2001, the canal was reopened by Prince Charles. Today, many people enjoy visiting the canal to spend leisure time there. The most popular destination on the canal is The Falkirk Wheel.